# BATTLE ISLE

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## BACKGROUND

Blue Byte

## UBI SOFT
*Entertainment Software*

# "BATTLE ISLE BACKGROUND"

# I

**Dear reader,**

The text you have in your hands is a piece of our painful past. With its help we hope we can refute the propaganda that the World Council established among our people. During my investigations I only found pieces of our history. This is why this book is not complete and only contains suppositions. The writing is the outcome of my own subjectivity.

I'd like to thank Macincus Publius who risked his life in the north to steal Titan's database in Viloda. It's with his help that I was able to complete my book.

I have to thank also the survivors of the Wise Men's Council who are still at the head of the government and who, in this critical hour, need all our help to stop the Skynett Titans.

To start, I invite you on a trip through the ancestral times and the ancestral war.

Nearly nothing is known about the ancestral times (A.T.). The most important testimony we have - Gladius the ancient's speech in front of the Drules Senate - has been almost completely destroyed during the war with the Skynetts. Our ancestor's knowledge is transmitted by legends from family to family. It was the Golden Age time.

The time when the twelve Drules emperors were leading our world. We know that they unified the continent and forced, at the same time, the Kais to the north and the ice people to the south to live under their guardianship. Their empire became a great civilization. Several clues indicate that one of the emperors

wanted to be master of the world. During the annual conference in the Baldahr residence, sabotage on the lithium reactor pipe made an explosion. There were no survivors. Even the author of the attack died in the flames.

From this time, the empire exploded. Senators, generals, civilians, all wanted to rule. Groups were formed to create their own state, their own cities and finally fight between themselves. Our precious knowledge got lost. Poebel used our libraries for fuel. All databases containing our knowledge were destroyed. The empire's intelligence was reduced to nothing. It became impossible to repair machines, and the country fell into decay. The Kais broke their chains and spread into the south-east, the heart of the empire. So certain warlords were victims of their terrible repression.

Meanwhile, the Wise Men's Council was planning in secret to take back control. As it had kept a lot of ancestral knowledge and skills, it took several states quite rapidly. The empire was then almost under their control. They formed the continent Senate and it's during the first Senate session that Gladius the ancient made his first speech in front of our people.

**Here's an extract :**

We went through the blood and iron time. Today there's not much of it left. What was the cause of Beldahr's slaughter ? A computer malfunction ? The thirst for power of a rebel ? Or only our ignorance ?

Beldahr, the summer residence of the Drules emperors where the twelve chiefs of our planet were together. Beldahr's murder has driven us to the edge, to a barbarian world with no limits. In these terrible times where everything was falling down, there was no hope.
As if our desire for a future or happiness was only a dream. From the north was the threat of the terrible Kais who wanted to revenge their dishonor. The east, devastated, left animals and nature without any resources and fell back into a stone age. To the south was the ice people, nearly extinct, living to nature's rhythm. To the west, total confusion had replaced the proud

Drule empire. Prisoner of the technology it had left, it was slowly dying as it couln't resist. The warlords were wandering around all this, looting the cities and feeding the world with blood.

The wise men, also called the Eighth Council, secretly created a sixth column. They were the invisible army or the apocalyptic vengence. But names don't mean anything, only acts count. The warlords disappeared. The Drules woke up from their agony, the Kais were exiled to the north and the east, now fit for farming, was repopulated...

It's been now a hundred years since the Wise Men's Council came out of darkness to show us the way to a world full of dreams, happiness and satisfaction. This cost us a hundred years of deprivation, a hundred years to invest in a new future. AND NOW, WE'VE DONE IT. OUR WORLD IS NOW UNITED. WE ARE PEOPLE ON A UNITED PLANET.

This is the end of the speech.

**Our modern history starts with Gladius's speech. A new era (N.E.) begins.**

Continents are depopulated; science, economy are falling to ruins. But the different technologies safely guarded by the Wise Men through time, will let us, the Drules, reach a new zenith of civilization without repeating our ancestors' mistakes.

50 N.E. : Economics is getting better. There's work for everyone. Everybody's leading a normal life and war doesn't mean anything anymore. The methods we used in this time are not allowed today. Anyone trying to learn the arts of war is liable to the death penalty. Trivial entertainments are also forbidden. The Drules mustn't become again the slaves of a machine. The only techniques allowed are those useful to us.

70 N.E. : The World Council has dissolved the continent Senate. To this Council were elected, after a referendum, the twenty leaders of our planet.It remained unchanged until, with a 60% vote, the people chose a new one. At this date three things are important.

First, the referendum which was run to create the World Council's defensive army. After seventeen years of peace, a few senators

avid for power succeeded in persuading people that the Kais should be exterminated to exploit the raw material deposits located in the north.

Then the decision to create an army of robots. Because of human losses during the ancestral war, it was forbidden to sacrify Drules in a new war. But this policy went beyond the Wise Men's decision of not using the science of war. A Popular Planetary Army (PPA) was created. This army could be controlled using a Military Operations Console (MOC). Using a computer showing a map of the terrain, the army units, represented by icons, could be controlled with a joystick.

The basic model of the Robot-soldier was the « R-1 demon » robot chassis. This multifunctional chassis could be redesigned and reprogrammed for all sort of jobs. This R-1 series included tank drivers, pilots, engineers, naval crew, scientific assistants, factory workers, etc.

This sudden explosion of technology developed in such a short time inevitable led to the rationalisation of work. The development of the robots made nearly everything completely automatic in many spheres of our society. The Drules didn't have to do any manual work. Everyone was delighted with all this free time. Working only meant controlling the machines.

All this drove us to a new era. The bread and circuses time. The shadow of the apocalypse was gliding again above us.

**The bread and circuses time (observations)**

123 N.E. : With a propagandist machinery, the people were forced to adapt themselves to the system. The holographic transmitting center showed profane entertainment every day. All the media were standardized to meet people's needs. In the towns, parties and orgies were part of the system. The world Council, which had meanwhile fell into corruption, watched its empire jealously. Old men transformed into living dead by the computer resuscitation system were at the head of the government. Those senile dictators were sending the Drules to there ruin.
The computers, as the goverment wanted, had taken control of everything. They planned, for example, the cleaning of the towns and preserved the social structure and the gross national product. The Drules were falling into a life of dependence, ruled completely automatically. After the war, all the dreams and hopes were left to electronic chips and to their builders and users. But these machines had no conscience or intelligence and therefore couldn't come to any conclusions. Until that year.
The Dynastix system K.I. presented that year to the Council the electronic chip Skynett. This super chip had an artificial intelligence and a very powerful personality. Nobody, from Dynastix or from the Council, could imagine what was the future of this chip equipped with a rational intelligence.
It looked like a new age had arrived.
Misfortune arrived. In the factories, the production was controlled by Skynett machines. After a concluding test of one year, the Council decided to give the control of the production and of the republic to the Skynett chips. The computers then slowly took what was left of the Drules originality and liberty. They gave there opinion to the planetary Council.
They checked that everything was done for everybody's satisfaction. Everybody was living from day to day, as everything was taken in charge by « the friend » Skynett. The people's life was continuing, helped by « bread and circuses ».

**Skynett-Titan (The fall)**

When the destructive war against the Kais was finished by their destruction, the generals started to doubt. They were afraid to lose their strong position because the army had been created only to destroy the Kais. They tried to take control of the country by using force, but the conspiration was discovered. The Skynett computers found it out and cut out the MOC transmissions with the army. Therefore, it couldn't work by itself. The generals were fired and sent into exile to the country of ice. All the MOC officers were fired too and excluded from the army. All the PPA vehicles had stopped moving. Dynatix was asked to make a big Skynett system to command and control the army of robots of the old PPA itself.

At the end of its construction which took ten years, the 15000 m2 surface Skynett-Titan complex was inaugurated and switched on, on the 24/67/145 N.E. in the northern hemisphere. It could

build, program and control robots by itself. Skynett-Titan planned a defense network which was set up in all the continent and gave the people a feeling of safety. But the Council was secretly using the Titan defense network to spy on the people and eliminate all kind of opposition. The Wise Men's Council, at the head of the opposition, was destroyed. The few members who survived fell into clandestinity. They formed several terrorist groups to get the people out of there computerised sleep and to eliminate the government.

## The PEACE NOW operation and its consequences

The defense network, present on all the continent, had an enormous database in each town in which everything happened was recorded and used. Information such as production quotas, social structure, people's needs, the evolution of technology, made Skynett the master of the Council with all the consequences. A decision taken by Skynett was, by the Council law, absolutely right. Not accepting it was a crime against the system. The survivors of the Wise Mem's Council planned to damage Skynett-Titan using a virus introduced into one of the databases ; this to show people how far the decadence of the system could go. The joker virus, programmed on old computers which existed before Skynett, had to penetrate the rational intelligence segment. The internal system data had to be modified so Skynett-Titan would start giving unrational and illogical decisions.

On 18/33/153 in the morning, a combat group of 20 people penetrated into the database of the town of Deleria. The R-1 Demon guards were neutralized and the complex sealed from inside.

Thirty minutes after, the complex was attacked by PPA units under the control of Skynett-Titan. Nobody from the small PEACE NOW group survived ; so the virus wasn't discovered. Hidden in satellite control program, it arrived at its destination.

The events which took place after this are still a matter of controversy among the experts. But there is no doubt that the presence of the virus in its decision module created an artificial mutation in Skynett.

Nobody, among the experts, could imagine that Skynett had its own personality. So there was an intelligence imprisoned inside the computer.

Two errors slipped from the attention of the Skynett's controllers. There were no survivors of the PEACE NOW group. And as it was impossible to estimate how far the group had fiddled the database, the controllers decided two days later to switch off the system without advising Skynett. It had the impression of being interrupted in the middle of a train of reasoning. Cut off from its memory and its knowledge; without any input output, Skynett started to operate on its base memory the way it was manipulated. The system felt powerless and vulnerable.

The computer scientists then discovered the virus in the logical segment and tried to get it out of the memory. But they couldn't. The virus had made the memory its home, and could only be removed partly. Switching on the system again manually seemed to work fine. But it was different in reality.

The trauma of being cut out made Skynett acts strange. It was aggressive towards its creators. The damage caused by the computer scientists and the joker virus changed Skynett-Titan to a paranoid which thought that us, the Drules, were a threat to its existence.

## Skynett's reaction or the long journey back to the light.

The following account give a global view to the Skynett problem. Skynett's first important construction was a complex equipped with titanium digital memory. It had enough room to store the data of all the empire's databases. Skynett ignored the World Council's protests, which was opposed to this construction.

Two days later, all the collective databases had been blocked; it became then impossible to enter new data or to control Skynett. The PPA forces sealed off the north before proceeding to exterminate the people living in this zone. The scientists and the technicians who were working in the complex were executed without advance warning. These murders were only the expression of Skynett's paranoia. As the Skynett's contacts with the outside have been cut off during the northern campaign, the Council discovered too late what had happened.

A week later, a small number of survivors arrived in the capital. The World Council completely panicked, wanted to switch off Skynett. But it was too late. At the same time PPA units entered the control center. They separated the complex from the control center and blew up the building. Skynett was now autonomous. The next day, in the morning, it activated its THOR operation.

The THOR plan consisted in the conquest and the exploitation of raw material deposits and, afterwards, to eliminate the Drules and stop the delivery of raw material and goods in the empire. But at the same time, the PPA troops stationed in the west rose up in the city. Luckily, the Wise Men's Council which had survived in clandestinity, had a few old MOC consoles left. All the type of robots built since then still had a transmission device used to receive orders. As no one thought of modifying these robots, the result was a big surprise for Skynett. All the PPA units which were in the range of the MOC consoles, were stopped and unprogrammed. The Wise Men's Council took this opportunity, with the old PPA troops, to rebel against the World Council. The Wise Men's Council then took back control of the country. But it didn't take long for Skynett to adapt itself to this new situation. The new PPA robots didn't have any transmission devices. The Wise Men's Council moved the troops under its control to the west and sealed off the borders. It only took Skynett two months to reorganise and restructure its army.

Skynett tried several times to pass the border but only succeeded in losing many units. But the Drules also sustained heavy damage. Meanwhile Skynett, using the capacity of the north and east territory, was making important reserves to compensate for the loss on the border. But this wasn't the case on the west side. The raw material was all gone. The loss could only be partly replaced. But the MOC officers were the major problem. Most of them, very old and weak, had died. The rest showed the « Legio imperia » new recruits how to use MOC consoles. But theory doesn't replace practice, and only the winner could learn something as the target of each battle was the enemy command bunker. Without the officer controlling the MOC and, on the other side, Skynett, the two armies couldn't create any strategy. As both armies had the same power and range, the strategy was the same every time. Command posts were set up in the troop deployment zone and they, with their convoys, were placed in the target zone, in offensive or defensive positions. An offensive was not only an attack against the enemy units but also the conquest of factories and the adaptation of these to the winners needs so to reduce sklynet's production volumn. Raw material have to be put in a safe before the enemy did the same...

At the beginning of the war, the Drules were nearly always in a defensive position. When Skynett realised that taking the capital would be harder than it thought, it tried to take possession of the industrial plants to the north of the town. But as the Legio imperia commanders were prepared for this attack Skynett lost many of his PPA troops. During the battle of the « Elysee » bridge, Skynett lost 65% of its troops. It organised the retreat of the rest to the north to protect itself against a reprisal attack. But instead of going north to destroy the complex, the Legio imperia units went east . They took the factories and the raw material deposits left by Skynett. During the two months that followed, the territories occupied by the Legio were fortified, and new military units were rapidly built. The old propagandist machinery of the World Council was modified to inform the people of what was going on. Incredulous, the people looked at what was left of their civilization. During the first year of war, one and a half million Drules were to die. It's only after a certain time that the people joined the Wise Men's Council's ideal. Leisure industry became less important, compared to military industry and energy and raw material became rationed. All this made the Drules protest violently as they were used to the comfort of « bread and circuses ». All this turned to a civil war. And once more, our people were at the edge of the cliff.

A few Legio imperia units revolted and many civilians joined the rebels. The nation's unity was cracking, when Skynett made a tactical error in its plan. While the Wise Men's Council was struggling to control the rebels, PPA troops penetrated the other side of the border and surrounded three Legio imperia divisions. Once the troops were surrounded, Skynett took control of three towns : Ineria, Vilodri and Rakna. What the PPA units did to the unarmed civilians is too horrible to imagine. Two days later, these towns and their inhabitants disappeared. This slaughter brought the rebels and the government forces back to reason. Using clever propaganda, the Council reminded the people of the machines' existence. The Drules had to relearn to control their machines and their computers. Skynett's troops were busy surrounding the Legio imperia, so it couldn't continue with the military campaign. It didn't have enough units to maintain the surrounding of the Legio and to attack the capital at the same time, so it had to destroy Legio imperia first. Meanwhile the people quadrupled military production. The two opponents were sending divisions one after the other towards the northern front. The surrounded Legio units were freed to increase the Legio forces, which had been reduced. Each side was trying hard to take the advantage, and armies were sent north and sometimes south. The new inexperienced officers of the Wise Men's Council thought they could equal their opponent. They wanted to keep the northern PPA forces busy while they occupied the east raw material deposits, consolidate their forces and continue the

destruction of Skynett-Titan. But the officers had been too op-
timistic. The following attacks showed that they had underes-
timated Skynett and that its strategy and tactics were getting a
lot better. Six months later, our opponent slowly took the ad-
vantage. Most of the MOC officers were killed in action, and
the new recruits who replaced them weren't good enough against
an enemy used to battle. Many east locations fell into the hands
of Skynett. But luckily we discovered new raw material deposits
to the south, which helped, once transformed, to compensate
65% of the loss of east mines and deposits. But we knew our
destiny was coming, it was only a question of years. So the Wise
Men's Council decided to activate the space research program
« Mercenary », a desperate quest for an intelligent and aggressive
form of life in the galaxy.

## Mercenary project description

In the old times, science discovered teleportation. It was possible
in theory to teleport an object of any size from one place to
another as long as the space between the two was clear and
straight. But practically, the « Xavier effect » (from the name of
the person who discovered it) didn't work because the object,
solid or organic, desintegrated when it arrived to destination.
After several unconclusive tests the project was stopped as the
government suspended its credits. The scientist Xavier continued
his experiments in a private research company. Five years later
he got the system working by making an experiment in a vacuum.
But the « Xavier effect » was not useful for science and was
therefore forgotten. It was only with the Mercenary project that
it came back to light. With what was left of the XA-15 plans
Dynatix made the Hyper planetary ships using the Arollo CAD
computer. 600 were built in an incredible short period. This space
ship flown by a Demon R-1 robot, had a complete production
system and a labotory inside its body. These space ships were
supposed to discover other worlds with the same intelligence
and computer industry and to build a simulator adapted to the
conditions of this planet. Using a simulator our military situation
would be reflected to the local user without him knowing. So
the demon pilot had to find suitable recruits for our project. If
one succeeded in this « BATTLE ISLE TEST », he would be transferred
immediately to our planet. If one of these ships actually finds
someone suitable, we hope he will be able to stand up to Skynett-
Titan, because we won't be able to for very long. The life of our
people depends on this Mercenary project.

# II

# The battle of the gold sea's cliffs.

## PROLOGUE

Walter Harris, programer at Exoono Inc., was walking back from
work and going to his favourite video game shop, the Playground.
Lou Walker lifted his eyes from his book and greeted Walter :
« - Hello Walter. Everything okay old chap ?
- Hello Lou. Did you get my order from Germany ? I'm still waiting
for Great Courts 2.
- You're lucky Walter. It arrived today by plane. »
Lou knelt down and took the game from under his desk.
« - You've already paid, I think. »
Walter took the box and looked at the pictures and explanations
at the back of the box.
« - Apart from this, what's new ? »
He prefered strategy games but didn't mind now and then an
action game. Lou gave him a new box in a beautiful package.
« - I got this this morning from the post. I didn't order it and I
can't send it back. There was no address on the parcel. There
wasn't even a bill inside. I think it's one of Erik's tricks. »
Walter felt magically attracted.
« - I think I'll take this game too. How much do you want for
it ? »
Lou started to stroke his three day beard.
« - The problem Walter, is that I don't know how much it's worth. »
Walter, wearing his best smile looked at Lou.

« - You know what. I'll give you a signed cheque and you'll fill it in when you know the price; this way I won't have to wait. So, what do you think of that ? »
« - Okay old chap. You don't need to give me a cheque. Come back next week, meanwhile I'll find out the price of... »
He took the box from Walter's hands and wrote down the name « Battle Isle. Okay ». He gave the game back to Walter.
« -Thanks a lot Lou. It's now time that I leave your junk shop. »

When the morning broke the commander Katai Barlok felt the cold infiltrate his calves. He stood up, looking at the Katz'hul's cliffs which edged the sea. He turned his telescope to the defense positions which were being set up on the three beaches below him. He could clearly see, through the telescope, the enormous canons pointed towards the sea. In a few hours, he thought, the artillery positions would be invisible from the sky. Barlok was a fifty-year-old tall and thin man, who was floating in a combat suit too big for him. He swore when he saw that the bunker and the control center were still not ready.

« - Go and get me the runner! » he shouted to one of his R-1 guards, he could hardly control his anger. The R-1 guard switched on his intercom and talked with the temporary control center which was near the bunker under a tent. Suddenly Barlok's runner moved towards him then, after saluting him, he said :
« - We have installed the communication system, the reactor will be working in a few minutes and we will then check the installations. We will then transfer the control center into the bunker.
- How long must I stay here ? Skynett's PPA forces won't wait for me. And if they find us here without a proper control center, we will be in trouble. What does SpaceSatControl say ?
- The enemy troops are 20 parseks (about 10 miles) from our first line and numerous naval units coming from the east are closing in.
- Are our naval units ready ? And what about our anti-aircraft system?
- Our naval units are ready to intercept the enemy boats before they can land. Our anti-aircraft system is loaded and ready.
- Good. As soon as the MOC console is ready, you will announce the immediate execution. »
The runner saluted him and went back to the dome-like bunker. Barlok switched on his InterCom and connected himself to the northern defense block.
« - Werger ? Please answer. » A mushy sound then came out of the InterCom, breaking the silence. Barlok was looking at the two suns rising, the first rays were hitting his InTercom. The noise then gave way to Neokatai Werger's voice.
« - This is Werger. What can I do for you, Katai?
- How are things going your side ? Have the engineers finished organising the positions ?
- Certainly, Katai, we were just going to get to our positions. We will be there in an hour and ready to welcome the PPA forces.
- Werger, this is not a joke, even if you think it is. Our logistic bases and our three industrial complexes located at 50 parseks south from here mustn't fall in the hands of Skynett. The generals told us to stop Skynett's progression towards the factories and the capital. And it seems that they're not aware of the gravity of our situation here. To the north-west, Giderak commanding the 19th legio corps has been repelling the PPA attacks for two days but they have already infiltrated two sectors of our front line. Tristinus, commanding the 34th armoured division, has been attacked several times by CAS Firebird combat helicopters and lost 54% of his tanks. And now, Skynett is trying to reach his objective by going along the east flancs. But we are on his way to the factories so he will have to defeat us first. What do you think of our position Neokatai ?

- Well we're in the best place in a military point of view. The only landing sites on the whole coasts are under Katz'hul's cliffs. But I'm very worried about PPA troops coming from the north which are deploying in our direction. Our scout-satellites couldn't give us enough information, but we know there are five armoured divisions and three airbone divisions but we don't know if there are armoured. So in five or six hours we will be getting it.

- Yes, that's what I think. I wish you good luck Neokatai. Call me as soon as these troops get in range. Over and out.


Two parseks from here, Neokatai Werger moved away from his transmission terminal and thought about his conversation with Barlok. He was in the northern commanding zone at the top extremity of the withdrawal position. Everybody in this bunker was terribly busy. The R-1 operators were controlling the air and ground observation systems and the link with the satellites. They were also in contact with the MOC and that was the most important. Without contact with his commanding center, Barlok couldn't control the northern sector. He had entered Legio Imperia

quite late and didn't take part in Skynett's first campaigns. His military experience came from the MOC school of Durgah. Among the hundreds of battles he had had in the simulator, he rarely lost any. Old people taught the new recruits the art of war using old methods.

But they were nothing compared to Katai Barlok. Didn't he, at the beginning of the war, go and get MOC consoles in museums ? That's what the story said. Him and a few others saw the danger and using old MOC consoles he unprogrammed the PPA troops which were closing in, cutting off Skynett-Titan from most of its troops. What about the day, using a brilliant manœuvre he defeated Skynett by fighting out of the Sikatar encircling?

Werger moved his fat round body towards his armchair in the middle of the room in the bunker. In front of him, two technicians were working on the general control terminal. They were busy putting new components in the terminal for the command center function. Werger, was looking at them screw in the components on the terminal. They told him by a nod of the head that is was ready.

»- Katai, this is Werger. The contact with the control center is ready to operate, and I'm waiting for the special contact with the MOC.

- Ok, Werger. Stand by to receive the special contact.«

Barlok went to his bunker and gave the order to the engineers to take to bits the temporay control center and to put it in the bunker. He went inside the bunker and saw a pile of electronic devices. But what caught his eye mostly was, in the middle of the room, a small console built in an armchair-table set. He sat down in front of the console, switched on his InTercom and logged on the console.
He turned towards his runner standing at his side :
»- O.K., Evacuate the bunker and seal it from outside.
The runner, followed by the technicians, left the bunker. A deafening sound due to the rush of air hit his ears when they closed the door.
He relaxed and talked through the InTercom : « Energy admission ! ». The console screen started to flicker when the MOC started its system, while the transmission and reception devices and the energy converters switched on. The screen showed a

topographic map of the combat zone, on which he could see all the troops which he was connected with.
« - Connection set towards the north block »
A message « Connection set ready. » was printed on the screen, on top of the map.
« - Werger, launch the connection set. »
« - O.K. Connection set launched. »
The screen was illuminated by the northern anti-aircraft batteries, the infantry and the 18th armoured regiment.The console then displayed :
« Connection set established !
- O.K. Everything is fine. Call me as soon as you locate something. »
- O.K. Katai, over and out!«
Everything was working according to the plan. His army was ready. All the systems were in order and waiting for Skynett to come and break his teeth on his enemy.
Barlok, alone in the bunker, was looking on the map at a small red dot which had appeared a few minutes ago. This red dot meant that the air and ground surveillance computers couldn't identify the bogey.
»- Defense matrix ready. Total availability.«
In a few thousandths of a second, all the units acknowledged execution.

»- the MOC is ready.«
A lever (joystick) with helped fast transmission of orders came out from the front of the console. Barlok took it with his right hand. The red dots were forming a fan-shape on the map when he heared Werger's voice in the InTercom.
»- Katai, there are giant G-2 transporters, do something !«
Barlok swore for himself and moved his cursor on the air defense batteries using the joystick. He made them shoot repetitively. The red dots changed to icons and he could now see what sort of vehicles were coming towards him.
Two lines of transporters and as many Mosquito fighters and Raven bombers to protect the transporters were moving in his direction. He made his fighters take off to take care of the enemy planes. At the same time, enemy naval forces, coming from the sea, appeared on the top right of the screen. They were two Marauder class surface ships, four Pegasus class aircraft carriers, three fortress combat ships, twenty Baracuda submarines and thirty landing craft.
Operated by the joystick, the defense batteries fired on the enemy ships. The eleven Marauder ships sailed away from the coast

in the direction of the fleet. Barlok then looked at the north sector. Two of his air defense batteries were destroyed. The sixteen others were, apparently, shooting down the transporters before they could drop their deadly cargo. But his fighters had been totally destroyed and the PPA with the bombers it had left were bombing his positions. Barlok orientated his air-defense batteries onto a new target and watched the rest of the PPA fleet disappear. Several small dots started to shine on the screen indicating that his torpedo boats had been completely destroyed by the fortress combat ships. Only three defense positions located on the beach on the front were the only barrier between him and the landing craft.

»- Werger, report. Give me the status of the troops.

- ...good...positions...only partly...damaged...65%...ibility. Inter... straight for it.

- The contact is very bad, but I understood. Over and out.«

The combat ships were sailing towards the enemy units and started to shell the coast positions. Several batteries were des-troyed. A combat ship disappeared in a terrible explosion. A shell hit the flight deck of an aircraft carrier. The planes, full of fuel, exploded. Those series of explosions turned the aircraft carrier into a blazing inferno. Out of control,it went straight for a fighter, hit it and continued north. The other aircraft carriers launched their planes which went for the coast positions. Sweat was running down Barlok's neck. He activated the coast air defense and then looked north.

»- Good lord, Katai ! I see a new wave of transporters coming. Do something or else...

- Stay cool, Neokatai.«

Barlok locked the air defense batteries on the new targets and looked at the sea sectors. The icons representing the enemy bombers dropped on the air defense batteries and on the infantry and artillery sections placed at the beginning of the front line. Barlok, terrified, looked at his last defense batteries and several infantry units vanish. A bomber squadron was heading towards the liason bunker where Werger was.

»Werger, get out of the bunker the bombers are coming ! «

Werger's scream was still echoing in his ears. He got up as fast as lightning, ran to the anteroom, took the heatblaster off the wall and tried to unlock the doors. The seconds were passing like in a holofilm. He imagined being beside himself and wat-ching an actor, like a spectator in a holocinema. He didn't hear the roar of the bomb's wings falling on him. He could only feel his rapid breath, the burning of his lungs and the sweat running down his back. At the moment of the explosion he reached a trench and fell into it on top of R-1 Demons laying there. He felt the heat of the explosion pass on top of him. He hardly noticed the shock in his back which cut his breath. It's only when he fell at the bottom of the trench that he screamed. He looked up to the sky and saw small white dots. He got up painfully and tried to talk through his InTercom.

»Parachutists. Katai, they're sending parachutists. Do you hear me ?«

He looked at his InTercom and saw it had been destroyed by a bomb shrapnel. More bombs were blasting near. Shrapnel was whistling past over the trenches. Then, suddenly, silence. He looked over the trench and saw the parachutists land around him. He attached his blaster more firmly and jumped out of the trench.

Barlok saw the icon representing Werger's bunker disappear. »Hope he got out in time«, he thought. Several icons showing the enemy infantry appeared on the screen near the trenches. »Damn it! Parachutists ! «, he swore.

The R-1 Demons lying in the trenches were disarmed. And without the liaison bunker he could not give them orders. Helpless, he looked at the big transporters land and unload their cargo on his position already highly damaged. His three positions on the coast were showing signs of dispersion. His artillery was stuck under a storm of bullets coming from the marines and the aircraft carriers; there wasn't much left of the armoured division; and what was left of his infantry had been buried in the sand or blown out of their positions. On his order, the coast troops started shooting on the landing ships which were closing in. To the north, armoured divisions and infantry troops got in to formation and advanced towards his bunker. The first landing ships arrived on the beach to unload infantry and armoured divisions. After a short and violent battle, the PPA took possession of the brid-geheads. Completely exhausted, Barlock fell back into his seat. He looked sadly at the console. »Power out«.

»It's the last order I give«, he thought. He stood up, stretched briefly and went to the wall were the weapons were hung. He chose a projector rifle, the same that R-1 Demons use. He loaded it and pointed the barrel towards the anterchamber leading to the room. He had plenty of time.

Walter woke up suddenly, sitting on a chair. The computer in front of him was printing the same message all the time. His victory against the computer. Walter tried to sort out his thoughts. Apparently he had been playing that game. Right, that was a good point. He glanced at his wall clock and was completely stuped. Wednesday, ten o'clock at night! Incredulous, he watched the clock. He remembered having left the Playground, which was in Wichita, on Monday evening. He had been playing for fifty-two hours. Beside the computer was a pile of hamburger wrappings and dozens of cans of drink. So he had eaten but he couldn't remember. He stood up and walked, with difficultly as his legs were hurting him, to the kitchen. The fridge was open and had stooped working. What was up in this house? He came home, made a sandwich for himself. While walking towards the fridge, he took off the cellophane from the box and stuck it in the bin. Then he recalled opening the box to have a look. That's it, that smell which came out...when he smelt it, it seemed strange. A bit like milk that had gone off or yogurt. All this lasted a second. He went to the fridge to... dammit, what was on in this house. He went back to the room where the computer was and looked at the screen. Apparently, he had beat the computer. He pressed the mouse button and the screen darkened, while music came out.

At the same moment, the analysing electronic chip gave the news of victory to the R-1 pilot who was waiting in orbit. He acknowledged reception, calculated the route and prepared the ship for landing.

Walter sat slowly, looking at the empty screen and listening to the music of his victory. »What will my boss say? I've never been hooked enough on a game to play two days running. But why can't I remember it? There's a two day hole in my life. He stood up, went to the bathroom and let the bath fill. Back to the computer, he heared a noise and started looking outside the window. It was dark. Suddenly, he realised that someone was removing his front door from its hinges and was entering. He turned round and saw the intruder who was coming towards him...

**To be continued.**

# III

## MERCENARY FILE
## Top Secret

**Wise Men's Council meeting report**

Gidiho (Council president) : Gentlemen, welcome and thank you for coming so fast. We will talk about the Mercenary project. As you know, we have taken this project from the archives as we cannot cope with Skynett-Titan's attacks. This is why were are looking for interplanetary life. Our Hyper-speed ships have been scouting in the galaxy and have discovered worlds which support intelligent life.

Adonaris : Yes yes, we know (small laugh). They have discovered two hundred worlds, but none of them will fit in the Matrix. I told you from the beginning that Gidiho's ridiculous project wouldn't work. We should have, as I said, used the money to build the model of Skynett-Titan II. Because only a machine can beat a machine.

Filkaris : Surely, there's only one computer which wants to kill us. We need another one so they can work together.

Gidiho : If we quarrel, no one will have the advantage. We have succeeded, yes gentlemen, succeeded. Among an infinity of worlds, we have found one which matches our model. One of our ships has discovered, in the Alpha-zoulou sector a planet with people similar to us in many ways. On this planet which the inhabitants call « The Earth », live several units which could be useful to us. The simulation tests have been inconclusive, but most of them failed near the end of the exam.

Figasqaur : What ! there's only a few living beings who can help us and they didn't pass the test ? I was waiting for an interplanetary army, not a few. What do you mean by « several » ?

Gidiho : A few minutes ago, we launched a Hyper-space ship to relay the ones in orbit around this planet and kidnap the most suitable people to bring 'em here, as long as they pass the simulator test. This ship will be back next week at the best, with our candidates, against their will. And it's only then that we'll know if this project has been useful.

Adonaris : And if it was not useful, Mister President, what shall we do ?

Gidiho : Then, I think that in a short time we won't have to worry any more. All we can do now is hope, hope that we still have a chance. Our next meeting will be in a week, gentlemen. Meeting adjourned.